

SOUTHWEST FISHERIES SCIENCE CENTER
SECOND QUARTER REPORT-FY 2002
For the period January 1, 2002 through March 31, 2002

SUBMITTED BY: John Hunter, Director, Fisheries Resources Division

Title of Accomplishment or Milestone: Produce report on the 2001 U.S. purse seine fishery for tropical tunas in the central-western Pacific for the South Pacific Regional Tuna Treaty Consultation.

Background Information: The Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), the South Pacific Tuna Treaty (SPTT) manager, annually convenes a meeting of parties to the Treaty. Meetings have been conducted since the start of the SPTT in 1988. Attendees usually include representatives of the 16 Island nations, the FFA staff, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) representative (the SPC is the scientific consultant of the FFA), and the U.S. (usually consists of a NMFS science representative, a State Department representative and members of the tuna fishing constituency). Discussions focus on operational aspects of the SPTT such as the number of licenses, closed areas or reporting, observer placements, statistics collection, etc. The NMFS provides a summary of the past year's fishing and an assessment of the stock status to date.

Purpose of Activity: To summarize 2001 central-western Pacific U.S. purse seine fisheries statistics.

Description of Accomplishment and Significant Results: NMFS produced and will present a paper entitled, "The 2001 U.S. purse seine fishery for tropical tunas in the central-western Pacific." Thirty U.S. purse seiners fished in the central-western Pacific in 2001, a decrease from the 33 in 2000. Logbooks and landings data were collected from 100% of the fleet and length measurements and species compositions were collected from landings of 46,000 fish. The 2001, U.S. tropical tuna catch (yellowfin, skipjack and bigeye tunas) continued a declining trend that started in 2000 and reached the lowest levels since 1988 (112,000 t). Much of the fleet stopped fishing in December 2000 and continued to remain in port through January 2001 in an effort to decrease supplies of light meat tuna, as cannery prices for small tunas (<7.5 lb) continued at record low levels. After resuming fishing in February 2001, the fleet concentrated on schools of free-swimming tunas (51%) and less on schools associated with Fish Aggregation Devices (FADs, 49%). Free-swimming schools usually contain larger fish and higher proportions of yellowfin tuna, market categories that typically yield higher prices. However, sets on free-swimming schools are half as successful as sets on FADs, which weakened many of the fleet's performance indices. As a result, catch rates decreased from 27 t/day fished in 2000 to 25 t/day fished in 2001, and average sets per trip increased 7% from those reported in 2000.

Significance of Accomplishment: The paper and participation by NMFS continues monitoring of a valuable U.S. fishery and its associated stocks, supports the constituency and maintains the mission of NMFS in building sustainable fisheries.

Problems: None.

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